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At the New Yorker

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AT THE NEW YORKER

by

Therese Anderson

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

UNIVERSITY HONORS
WITH DEPARTMENT HONORS

in

ENGLISH

Approved:

Department Advisor

Director of Honors Program

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COMMENT

The following essays and letters grew from a notebook I kept while interning at *The New Yorker* last summer. Each night, in my room at a boardinghouse on 36th Street, I recorded the decorations of the day, like the conversation I had with a prominent writer in the lunchroom, or the sight of a startled shorebird in front of the office building. On weekends, in the half-light of my desk lamp (I could never find the switch for the overhead lights) I crafted the scribbles into essays and then sent them off to my professor, Helen Cannon, for review.

Before coming to New York, I had determined to write the essays in the distinctive style of the Talk of the Town. I had long admired this section of *The New Yorker* for providing a place where the writer could present a subject and employ voice, while at the same time keeping focussed on the people, scene, or happening at hand. In other words, the writer can be subject but not object of the sentences (*I write about this, or her, or him or that, but not I write about me*). Classic "Talk" pieces have allowed for the presence of the writer, but not for autobiographical foray or solipsistic indulgence.

This form of the essay is not an article, not reportage, not journalistic column. There is no pyramid structure or the five W's and the H of standard reporting; it is more timeless than timely; and it is not written to be cut after any given paragraph for the sake of space. Nevertheless—and here's the paradox—it is dependent upon fact, but facts in unexpected places and with curious emphasis. Even though it's a short essay form, it gives the illusion of having a lot of time for the telling, relishing the details and allowing for odd turns and digressions.

My essay about Stanley Ledbetter, the receptionist on the editorial floor, for example, never would have

landed a spot in a newspaper. It digresses, and it appears to have no timely significance. But it gives the reader a picture of life on the editorial floor and of the person who presides over it. In this way, the essay bears a literary quality in its allowance of voice and detail.

Rereading my essays I find I reveal my presence in all but "Observation on 42nd Street," where my presence on the scene is implicit. When a writer uses dialogue, it's almost impossible not to use first person and still be truthful. Yet it's hazardous to use "I." The danger lies in the writer's overriding the subject. Tracy Kidder, in the introduction to 1994's *Best American Essays*, calls mastering the first person "the literary equivalent of perfect pitch." I suppose that in my refusal to vanish from the scene, I put myself there, catching the softball hit deep into right field in "Softball in Central Park," or regretting words spoken in "Stanley on Sixteen," or walking the halls of *The New Yorker*, and though, in fact, I had "been there, done that," I hoped that I would have drawn the reader in, so that the "I" that is me transcends myself alone to become Everybody.

My summer as a merchandising intern on the business floor started out as less than ideal, with the majority of my time being spent answering phones, making copies, and faxing documents—that is until I got my first assignment to do research in the editorial library two floors below merchandising. Since that hallowed archive was housed at the end of a long row of writers' offices, I treated my walk there with reverence. I often requested library assignments, and I saw it as an opportunity to take the long way back. These walks, and the people I met on them, gave rise to my observations in the following essays. The letters I've included were requests for interviews.

Special thanks to my parents, to Elaine Berman who secured me the position, and to Helen Cannon who got me there.

LETTER TO CALVIN TRILLIN

13 July 1995

Mr. Calvin Trillin
The New Yorker
16th Floor

Dear Mr. Trillin,

Last winter as a junior majoring in English literature at Utah State University, I recited your piece, "Paper Trails," to my Understanding Theatre class. My classmates immensely enjoyed your tale about rewriting. During that same season I applied for and received an internship with *The New Yorker* Education Program. As the program no longer exists, I am currently interning with the Merchandising Department. In addition to learning about the business side of the magazine, I am compiling a series of essays for my honors senior thesis on what it's like to work at *The New Yorker*. I know you do not visit your office on a daily basis and would probably not classify yourself as one who labors here, but I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss words and your writing with you.

I finished your book, *Remembering Denny*, during my lunch hour today over a wholewheat bagel at Mom's Bagels on 45th. I could relate with you when you wrote about your job as a correspondent, agonizing over sentences that people may never read, and I empathized with your remorse over telling an insensitive joke that may have pricked Denny during the Yale years. Beyond my aspirations to write Talk Pieces for *The New Yorker*, my greatest desire, in craft and in life, is simply to use words well.

I am interning here on the 18th

floor until Friday, September 15. I could come down to your office anytime during the week to meet with you. I will call your office within the next two weeks to see if an appointment is possible. I hope I will be able to meet you.

Sincerely,
Therese Anderson

STANLEY ON SIXTEEN

Stanley Ledbetter is perhaps the only man on the sixteenth floor of *The New Yorker* who wears a tie to work. In fact, he may very well be the only candidate in editorial eligible for Best-Dressed Employee/Office Wear on the entire floor. During an elevator ride, I met a fact checker from 16 who wore a flannel shirt and jeans. One stroll through editorial a few days later testified his outfit was representative of the entire department. On 18, the business floor, the dress is Armani and Chanel, or like unto it. Every *New York Post* reader knows that; Richard Johnson trumpeted it on Page Six of the June 15 issue. So from the looks of him Mr. Ledbetter belongs on 18. But his mind dwells on words, not money.

Mr. Ledbetter prefers bowties, but will wear a necktie to break the monotony. Broadcloth (only longsleeved) covers his torso, and a small gold chain fastened to one of his buttons extends latitudinally across his shirt into a chest pocket containing a pocketwatch. Mr. Ledbetter holds court seated in a wooden roller chair at a small desk a few steps out of the elevators. Once a week he conducts pre-meeting entertainment for the gaggle of cartoonists who come every Tuesday to present their drawings in the cartoon meeting. They lean into the

U-shaped, gray, sectioned couch behind Mr. Ledbetter, prop their feet on the coffee table where they have tossed their portfolios, and laugh until it's time to go in.

A bag of Louisville sluggers leans against a wall near Mr. Ledbetter's desk. He keeps them there not as a symbol of his authority, but as a reminder to all *New Yorker* softball team members that there is a game next Tuesday.

"We lost," he said when I inquired about the team's record. "*Vanity Fair* showed up with too few players, so we gave them some of ours, and we lost."

Mr. Ledbetter monitors the comings and goings of the editorial staff. He noted "Mitchell" getting into an elevator while telling me next week's game would be particularly interesting as the scheduled competitors always "show up stoned."

"Joseph Mitchell?" I asked, standing up from the hardbacked chair next to his. He also told me, when I asked, that Alec Wilkinson had come that morning. "He writes at home more now," he said.

I met Mr. Ledbetter before I knew about interoffice mail. I mention this because our first exchange was a handwritten note I addressed to Anthony Lane, praising his review of *The Bridges of Madison County*. I approached Mr. Ledbetter now for information on Calvin Trillin's office appearances and to see if I were eligible for the softball team. "We don't get many from the business side," he said.

He told me Mr. Trillin was currently in Canada, probably receiving his office mail. "What did you want to talk with him about?"

"What he's written, words, how to use them to shape a piece." I told him about reading *Remembering Denny* and about having memorized a piece he wrote in the fall, "Paper Trails," which appeared under "Shouts and Murmurs." Mr. Ledbetter nodded, his

eyes closed, his hand stroking his bearded chin. I explained my initial internship in the Education Program and then, when it was closed because of budget cuts, my shift to the Merchandising Department. "It's a different world on 18," he said, noting the floor where I worked. I looked at the bag in my lap and nodded. When I looked up at him again, I could tell he knew my frustration. Maybe my *Green Eggs and Ham* t-shirt paired with a black skirt, stockings, and stacked heels gave me away. Literary references rarely appear on the business floor.

Mr. Ledbetter has worked at *The New Yorker* since 1989. He revealed this only after he first told me, in jest, he had been an employee for forty-five years. His beard and hair are laced with gray, but his appearance registers under 50 years. I told him if that were true, he had worked there since he was five. He laughed and stretched back over the top of his chair.

He began in book publishing which he described as "much different" from working in a magazine. As he spoke, he kept his left hand under the desk near a button he pushed to unlock the glass doors for the flocks of employees and delivery people stepping onto the floor from six elevators every few minutes. People who exit the elevators through the doors opposite Mr. Ledbetter turn around to wave hello. He waves back.

"It's slower there," I told him.

"Yes, it's a nine month gestation period from start to finish with books. And the rhythms are different at a magazine. *The New Yorker* is the place to be. People who write here feel a responsibility to live up to E.B. White, James Thurber, and they write remembering them. They feel obligated to use words well; they still know how. It's changed a little bit here, too."

"Drastically."

"Yes," he agreed. "Drastically."

"Do you ever see Her?" I asked.

"Her?"

"You know who I mean."

"Yes."

"Have you seen her?" he asked me.

"No, I've seen Si though. I mean, Mr. Newhouse."

"You two are close?" he said, raising his eyebrows.

He described the change of the magazine in terms of its audience, about a new focus on a younger age group. He called it "the democratization of the magazine," and let "democratization" roll off his tongue in his ocean of a voice as though he only got to say the word once or twice a year.

"You mean, ages 18-30?" I asked.

"Not that young. Up in merchandising they can pinpoint..."

"Yeah, I was going to say it's a lot older than that." According to marketing research, the highest percentage of *New Yorker* readers are in the 35-44-year age category.

And then, without warning, I said, "Would you let me come sit down here sometime so you can point out people to me?" The heavy weight forming at the top of my throat signalled I had just issued an absurd request. I got up from my chair and held my bag, glancing at the elevators. He looked at me.

"It would have to be discreet," he said.

"Of course," I said. A woman approached his desk. She had short, gray hair and a backpack strapped to her shoulders. "Hello, Ann," he said. I placed my bag strap over my shoulder and headed for the doors anxious to leave the air where I had left that ignominious inquiry. I pushed the green EXIT button on the wall near the door and pulled the handle.

"Take care."

I stopped. I did not know if he was speaking to me or Ann.

"Thanks," I offered, and got on the elevator.

THE KID

The first time I met Brendan Gill, I thought he was Joseph Mitchell. I mention this because I knew Mr. Mitchell was an older fellow from the jacket photograph on his book, *Up in the Old Hotel*. And my friend, Stanley, the receptionist on the sixteenth floor, told me that Mr. Mitchell still came to his office on a regular basis. So when I opened the doors of the *New Yorker* lunchroom and ran into the biggest smile I had received since coming to the city two months ago, I never would have guessed it belonged to a writer who I assumed was fifty years younger than the man before me now. But when you are a two-year *New Yorker* reader as I am, all you see is the prose, and your private vision of the head it came from.

I considered sitting next to the smiling eighty year-old that day in the lunchroom, but instead chose a seat at a table next to his, out of caution, I suppose. We didn't say anything to each other. He was watching TV, holding the remote in one hand, his head resting on the other, his legs crossed. I looked at the screen. The TV held a man with a microphone in front of the L.A. County Courthouse. This was the beginning of August, and the O.J. Simpson trial was approaching its *dénouement*. The man at my left was approaching his own *dénouement*. I looked over at him and saw his eyelids closed against the picture on the screen. He still held the remote, though, and on his left ring finger he wore a gold band. A fitted lavender cap clung tightly to his head and reminded me of a popular cap sold at the Trailhead ski outfitter shop on Main Street in my hometown. The hat matched his purple cotton tie and complemented the khaki stripes on his broadcloth shirt which matched the khaki-green of his cotton Dockers. The white hair peeking out

from under the cap led me to suppose this man was the Mr. Mitchell I had not yet met. So after he awoke suddenly, shot up out of his seat, slapped the remote control down upon the table, and pronounced to me, "I put you in charge!" I asked, "Are you Mr. Mitchell?" No, he told me with a rounded, gentle voice contrasting with the one he had used only moments earlier. "I'm Brendan Gill. He's around," he told me. "Only he's a little shorter, and a little bigger about the middle." At this he made a hump over his flat stomach with his hands.

A few weeks later I met up with Mr. Gill at a luncheon he attended promoting the Home Issue to advertisers. As guests walked in and ordered drinks, I checked off their names on my clipboard and directed them to the counter where an addressed envelope held their table number. I recognized Mr. Gill by the greeting he gave the editor, Tina Brown, when she entered. "TEENANA!" he called out, loud enough to capture the guests' cumulative attention. "How are you?" I struggled to see her reaction, but other guests blocked my view. Later, Mr. Gill approached me wondering if Chris Curry had arrived. "Yes," I said, checking my clipboard, "she came in with Caroline Mailhot." My first mistake was not knowing French, and the second mistake was the typo on my clipboard.

"Caroline WHO?" he asked.

"Mail-hot," I repeated.

"Oh!" he said, as though he had received a sharp, abdominal pain. Then he leaned in, "Think of having a name like Linda Jew." I supposed he had seen one of the envelopes that had not yet been claimed.

"I know," I said. "Guess who didn't come. Patti Gentile."

"Oh!" he said again, throwing his head back. Then he told me how, "Gosh, eighty years ago," his mother had requested a telephone be installed

in her hospital room while she recovered from delivering him. "And whenever anybody called she'd have them ask for 'Brendan' so she could hear how it sounded."

I told him my first name. "A saintly name," he said. Then I told him my middle name, making it 'Therese Marie.' "Even more so," he said.

I like Mr. Gill.

When he left the lunchroom, I watched him deposit his carton of Tropicana lemonade with a straw sticking out of it into the tall garbage hamper. But next to the foot of the chair I saw he had forgotten his white paper lunch sack. Just like a kid, he'd left it wilting on the floor.

LETTER TO ALEC WILKINSON

13 July 1995

Alec Wilkinson
The New Yorker
16th Floor

Dear Mr. Wilkinson,

I first became acquainted with your writing during one of my quarters as a student at Utah State University, being enrolled in an essay writing class where *The New Yorker* was used as text. Admiring your piece, "The Mouthpiece and Handsome," I decided to respond to it, practically line by line, for my final project. Your conversations with Herb Cohen and Larry King reminded me very much of my own kitchen conversations with my dad, his brother, and my brother.

Last summer my essay writing professor, Helen Cannon, gave me a taped copy of the speech you gave at the University of Pittsburgh in connection with *The New Yorker*

Education Program. While listening to it again last night I understood you when you said your writing approach is "more musical than literary." I am a cellist, but began as a pianist, and I remember my piano teacher telling me to play each note as though it were "going to or coming from someplace." Those were her words, and I think of them when I write.

I hope it will be possible to meet with you. I will call your office within the next two weeks to see if an appointment is possible.

Sincerely,
Therese Anderson

HOW TO SUCCEED

Six nights a week on 42nd and Broadway, Matthew Broderick transforms himself from window washer to president of the Worldwide Wicket Company in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. In the Back Issue and Tear Sheet Room, where writers' pieces and cartoons are carefully razored from surplus issues, on the 17th Floor of *The New Yorker* building on 20 West 43rd Street, life imitated art last week. Louis (pronounced Louie) Rojas, the fiftysomething manager of the Back Issue and Tear Sheet Room wanted to Take Control of His Own Career. At least that was the title of the article in the *Money* magazine found on his chair recently, which explains the man who entered Louis's office at approximately 2:28 p.m. on a recent Wednesday.

The Back Issue and Tear Sheet Room adjoins the mailroom. Louis's desk extends the length of the east wall with photos of two dark-haired newborns and a magazine ad of DeNiro, sweaty and swollen in *Raging Bull* affixed to it. Out of sight

from the casual back issue request bearer are two black and white photos stuck on the wall to the right of his desk: one of a girl with long, damaged hair wearing a *TNY* baseball cap, laughing in spite of her smudged mascara; the other of a woman kneeling in front of an upright guitar wearing nothing at all.

Metal shelves line the remaining three walls and run down the middle of the room. Louis stacks the magazines, according to month, in the cardboard boxes. New surplus issues arrive in every Monday. The dates of the issues, written in black marker, cover the end of each box. If the cover of an issue has been torn off, Louis writes the date of the issue on the first page in pen.

The Merchandising Department requests back issues when a cartoon or a quote from a particular piece is needed for an invitation. One request seen on Louis's desk recently was one made by Tina Brown. She wanted last year's fiction issue pulled the week before this year's fiction issue was sent to press.

A small section of shelves holds Good Issues from mid-1994 to the present. Louis keeps them there before taking them to the 19th Floor for storage. They are *meant* to remain tearless, as I discovered recently during a routine tear sheet assignment. I mistook the good issues for tear sheet issues. When I told him of my mistake, Louis's face broke into a sweat resembling DeNiro's on the poster. "Oh no, they'll need their good issues. Okay, come over here, come over here," his arms alternately motioning me out of the aisle and pressing against his forehead. "These are for tear sheets, over here. Did you keep track of which ones you pulled? Okay. Okay. Oh. Oh. They'll need their good issues. Oh. Oh."

The following morning I took my list and pulled all the issues I had torn from and put them in the tear sheet boxes. It bothered me to see him

shake as he did when he found my error. It did not look like it was good for his health.

The messenger guys in the mailroom heckle Louis. Louis threatens to hit them.

"Did you hear that? Louis says it took him twelve years to be Back Issue and Tear Sheet Room Manager. She knows more about your job than you do, Louis!" one said, referring to me as he ran from Louis.

Last Wednesday, Louis walked into his Back Issue and Tear Sheet Room. I was on the step ladder, pulling an issue from a top shelf. Suddenly all the noise in the mailroom stopped. I could not even hear the radio which is always tuned to an R&B station featuring Barry White songs. I turned my head and looked toward the door. There, in a yellow pique polo shirt, brown trousers creased down the legs, and a fresh haircut like the ones worn by the men on the 18th Floor, stood Louis. The mailroom employees stood where they had stopped when they saw him, their mouths open in disbelief. Nobody spoke. Then Karen, who supervises the messengers, let out a hoot. "Louis! What happened to you?" The mailroom exploded into whoo-ees and guffaws.

"I got a haircut."

"You sho' did get a haircut. How much did that cost you?"

"Twenty dollars."

"A TWENTY DOLLAR HAIRCUT? Where did you go?"

"Look at his clothes! Louis, what happened?"

"Wha'd you go do to yo'self, Louis?"

Louis kept walking in and out of his office while the mailroom roasted him. He looked as though he were dressed for an easy weekend in the Hamptons, except for the blue blotch of old tatoo ink seeping out of the lines on his forearm. From my perch on the ladder, I looked to his chair. The *Money* magazine was gone.

The following day Louis wore his

faded black sweatshirt and jeans without creases. The only reminder of his ten step plan to Take Control of His Own Career was a close-cropped haircut and a *Money* magazine curved around the cylinder of a trash can.

OBSERVATION ON 42ND STREET

On an afternoon last September while workers planted white tents and steel supports on Bryant Park sod and covered lamplights in purple cellophane in preparation for that week's MTV Music Awards after-show party, workers of a different sort joined a semi-circle forming across the street around a visitor stumbling down 42nd Street in front of the Grace building next door to the *New Yorker* offices.

Its chestnut feathers, long, Nadja Auerman-like legs, and slender, down-curved beak differed markedly from the gray stoutness of its city pigeon counterparts. This bird had no attitude. It was lost.

"Yep, it's a shorebird," said a worker with a half-moon of sweat soaking through the red bandanna he'd tied to his head. "That one's far from home."

"Oooh, yes. Look at it," said a woman in heels and a linen suit.

The bird stayed close to the building as though for support. The curlew sandpiper with the extraordinary bill half its body size, wings held tightly against itself, breast thrust forward, colored in vibrant cinnamon with flecks of taupe, rarely made its way to the Atlantic coast, and never into the middle of mid-day Manhattan.

"This is no place for that bird."

"He's sure lost his way."

"It's a shame it's here."

"I'm going in before it gets squished."

At this, the crowd, feeling they were already late from their lunch breaks, turned from the bird, resumed their courses, and headed to their offices. One man dressed in work boots, Levis, and a t-shirt with the sleeves cut off, resisted. He stepped in the direction of an electrical wire he was duct-taping to the sidewalk. Then he stopped.

"I can't stand to see what happens to him," he said, turning to face where he stood in the semi-circle. "I love animals."

SOFTBALL IN CENTRAL PARK

If you ever flip through a *People* magazine, you're bound to see at least one picture of a celebrity pushing a stroller or walking a dog in Central Park. And if you're ever in Central Park, you'll recognize somebody if you're lucky. When I began playing softball with *The New Yorker* team this summer, I thought I'd maybe see a famous person, but I knew not to make a big deal of it. You don't do that in New York. But if you play softball with them, now that's something.

I arrived at the diamond on a Thursday in late August. Stanley gave me the instructions on how to get to this part of Central Park, but I knew which field we were playing on from the giant Eustace Tilley banner draped over the chain-link fence in front of our dugout. I hadn't played softball in ten years, but when I saw the bag of bats near Stanley's desk and heard the talk about the rivalry with *Vanity Fair*, I knew I had to play. I went home and bought a pair of denim shorts at the corner GAP,

quickly ate my dinner, and got on the subway. Our coach and pitcher, cartoonist Stu Leeds, put me in right field that first game. We narrowly lost to *Vanity Fair*, who lost their editor to our magazine four years ago, and who kept referring to our male players as "Tina's Boy Toys."

I didn't see much action in that position until our game against *High Times*. They wore Grateful Dead t-shirts as jerseys and stamped out their cigarettes in the orange dirt when they got up to plate. One player, a man who looked to be his fifties, bobbed around at the plate and kept giggling while Stu tried to pitch to him. The fact checkers on my team told me he'd taken one too many hits in his day, and not the kind you get with a ball and a bat. Stu didn't like any messing around. Instead of refusing to pitch to him until he pulled himself together, Stu gave him quick strikes. Then their star player came up to bat. He wore blue batting gloves and had the physique of Casey from *Casey At The Bat*. Stu pitched him a nice one that cut a smooth hill in the air. The player swatted the pitch. All evening I'd been admiring the clover in the lawn and hunching down with my hands on my knees whenever anybody on my team turned around. But when I heard that bat crack, I looked up to see a white ball coming straight for me. I held my mitt up in the air like the Statue of Liberty with her eyes pinched shut and WHAM. The ball fell into my mitt. I looked at it, grinned in disbelief, and held it aloft to the cheers of fact checkers and cartoonists. Even Stu was happy. Mort Gerber, who was playing first base, turned around and gave me an emphatic thumbs-up. I was in.

I turned out to be a better fielder than a hitter. If I got to first, the bench was on their feet hollering and cheering. But after the catch I made against *High Times*, the team looked to me as their savior in right field. In our second game against *High Times*,

I got all my grounders to first base before the runners did. But we'd won anyway. That night only four *High Times* players showed. Jerry Garcia died the day before and their staff went to a vigil on the Great Lawn. After the game, a *High Times* player announced she'd brought brownies. "They're loaded," she told me. I got in line. I hadn't eaten brownies in months. One of my teammates asked her how she made them.

"I ground the pot up in the coffee grinder and put it in with the flour."

I got out of line.

We didn't have pot at every game, but each week the team downed a case of beer that came in green glass bottles. I relished the smell of it. When we got into huddles for cheers, I took deep breaths and likened the scent to being in a box of glazed donuts. I figured this beer wasn't cheap, because in the past the breath emitted by my high school beer-drinking classmates had smelled like a barrel of rotten apples.

I got to our game against *McCall's* one Thursday just as my team was unscrewing the caps off their brews. A man in fluorescent orange jogging shorts and a white t-shirt bearing a fluorescent orange insignia introduced himself as James Traub and sat next to me on the bench. James writes those pieces on the Manhattan politicals which follow the Talk of the Town. We watched as photographer Michael Crawford and his wife, Ann, and the features editor, Colin Moynihan, said to be a relative of Sen. Patrick Moynihan, joined us on the bench and helped themselves to the beer and pretzels. Just as we received our batting order, somebody sent a message down the bench that Gregory Hines had arrived with a friend from *McCall's*. I looked over to see a fellow in cut-off sweatpants tying his shoelaces. He wore a beanie knitted in bright colors. When *McCall's* took the field, James and I deliberated over whether the man on

first base was really the star of *White Nights*. I found his height a little deceiving. He didn't have the legs that Hines had when he played the jogger in *Muppets Take Manhattan*. I mentioned this to James. He didn't say anything. I guess he hadn't seen *Muppets Take Manhattan*. But what this man lacked in Hines's height, he made up in facial features. His eyes matched Hines's distinctive, heavy-eyed look. At this I dismissed my height discrepancy theory and marvelled that I was playing softball with one of the greatest tap dancers who ever lived.

When we took the field, I positioned myself in right field and massaged the palm of my mitt with my fist. I thought back to that catch I'd made during the *High Times* game, and the thumbs-up Mort gave me. The *McCall's* hits landed in left field, or rolled off the bat for the short stop to pick up. I watched the planes fly overhead and their tail exhaust divide the sky between batters. Then, Gregory or "Greg" as *McCall's* called him, got off the bench. He took some practice swings, stepped up to the plate, and swatted at the first pitch. I knew somehow that hit would come to me even before he hit the ball, even before he stepped up to the plate, perhaps I knew clear back when he was batting the dirt off his cleats. I knew. And I knew this would be my definitive catch: the catch Colin, James, and Stanley would talk about during their afternoon chats on the couches behind the reception desk; the catch the fact checkers would recall whenever they had a Roger Angell piece in front of them. Months later, when I would call the checking department inquiring after a job, I would say, "This is Therese Anderson."

"Who?"

"The girl who caught Gregory Hines's pop fly last summer?"

"Oh, yeah! Therese! When can you start?"

All of this fled when I put out my mitt. I realized that catching this ball would be like tripping Baryshnikov. I couldn't insult art.

My teammates gawked at me in disbelief after that ball bounced off the tip of my mitt and Gregory got on first. But they didn't understand. When I picked up the ball and threw it to the pitcher, Gregory turned to me and smiled. And when we got the three outs, he met me on the field and gave me a high five. "Thanks, man," he said.

When it was my turn to bat, and I got a hit, I half expected Gregory to miss the throw from third before I got to the base, just to make me feel better. I felt a bit betrayed and told him so afterwards. "What was that all about, Gregory?" I asked. He gave me another high five and said he was sorry.

McCall's won that game. We didn't care, even though it was the last game of the season. The days had been growing shorter and the diamonds had no electrical lighting. By 8:30 p.m., the ball was barely visible. Michael Crawford had been snapping action shots of us all night and began setting up his tripod for a group photo. We gathered around the Eustace Tilley banner. Gregory Hines and the *McCall's* team were getting ready to go. I wanted a picture of Gregory, and I had my camera with me, but I felt it would be something of an affront to ask. So instead, I smiled at Michael with the rest of the team and decided I had to rent *White Nights*.